

From Taiwan New Cinema to Cape No. 7: Auteurism and Beyond

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In the late 1980s Taiwan New Cinema (TNC) grew to be the gem of Taiwan film industry, amassing one award after another at international film festivals. Inspired by the French New Wave, TNC directors looked upon themselves as auteurs with distinct personal signatures. While they became a favorite subject of study in international academe, their elitism seemed to distance themselves from the general public and eventually led to a standstill in the development of Taiwan film. In 2008 *Cape No. 7*, directed by a hitherto unknown Wei Te-sheng, surprisingly claimed unprecedented box office success and triggered a series of comparisons with the much treasured heritage of TNC. What brought back the audiences into the movie theater? Was it the popular taste of the film, calling to mind Hollywood romantic comedy and TV drama series, that commercially triumphed over the elitism of TNC? Was the film heralding the long-awaited spring of Taiwan film industry? Indeed, more than a dozen films released since then have enjoyed enthusiastic support from fans, including the 2011 epic film *Seediq Bale*, directed by Wei himself, and the 2014 baseball story *Kano*, which he co-produced. But artistically speaking none of these films surpass TNC at its best (for instance, Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness*). Drawing evidence from the remarks on auteurism and film practices by Tsai Ming-liang, who still unflinchingly works in the auteur tradition, this paper argues that what drove audiences away from TNC was not its elitism, but the belief in auteurism at the expense of storytelling. An artistically superb film that tells a good story is what both film critics and general moviegoers enjoy alike. The real spring of Taiwan cinema still awaits such films.